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ABSTRACT

This study depicts the divorce process over three time periods: predivorce decision phase, divorce proper, and postdivorce. Research has suggested that persons with a more internal locus of control experience less intense and shorter intervals of stress during the divorce proper and better postdivorce adjustment than do persons with a more external locus of control. This research may have underestimated the impact of locus of control by not investigating situation-specific locus of control (marriage locus of control). This study presents a path analysis derived model of divorce stress and adjustment which predicts the impact of locus of control and the major demographic effects over the divorce process. Recently divorced men and women (N=107) completed a mailed questionnaire eliciting locus of control, difficulties, decision time, and divorce stress and adjustment. The path-analysis derived model suggests that: (1) locus of control is related to predecision stress, peak stress point, stress intensity, stress duration, and postdivorce stress and adjustment, but unrelated to decision time; (2) the relationship between locus of control and heavy stress changes over time from an inverse to a direct relationship; (3) compared to women, men report less predecision stress, shorter predecision periods, lower postdivorce adjustment, and more external Rotter Locus of Control scores; (4) marriage length is directly related to decision time and stress duration, but inversely related to predecision stress, point of peak stress, and postdivorce stress; and (5) childless couples report fewer difficulties, less postdecision stress, and shorter predecision intervals. (Author/ABL)

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Divorce Stress and Adjustment Model: Locus of Control and Demographic Predictors

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This study presents a path-analysis derived model of divorce stress and adjustment, which predicts the impact of locus of control and the major demographic effects over the divorce process. The study depicts graphically the divorce process over three critical time periods (decision phase prior to the divorce proper, divorce proper, and postdivorce), in contrast to previous research which looks at divorce in a piecemeal fashion statistically denying that divorce is a process. Also, the study's findings extend our knowledge of the divorce process, particularly the impact of locus of control, but also the impact of demographic factors.

The hypothesized model included two locus of control variables (Rotter Locus of Control and Marriage Locus of Control or situational control), three demographic variables (gender, children, and duration of marriage), decision time, number of divorce difficulties, and six measures of stress and adjustment (predecision stress, point of peak stress, stress duration, stress intensity, postdivorce stress and social maladjustment). The model hypothesized that, compared to externals, internals experience more predecision stress, longer predecision periods, earlier peak stress, but less and shorter periods of stress during the divorce proper and less postdivorce divorce stress and social maladjustment.

Using women who were receiving counseling for marital dissolution, Brown, Perry, and Harburg (1977) found a relationship between internality and lack of distress. They also reported that a woman's personal growth and adjustment over a four month span was directly related to her sense of control. Looking at women who were already divorced Pais (1979) found that internals, as opposed to externals, were better adjusted. Together these two studies suggested that internals experienced less intense and shorter intervals of stress during the divorce proper and better postdivorce adjustment than externals. However, these studies may have underestimated the impact of locus of control, because they did not investigate situation specific locus of control (marriage locus of control) as previously suggested by Rotter (1966). Also, these researchers did not include men and did not investigate a number of important divorce reactions (e.g. decision time, predecision stress, and peak stress point).

Additional research suggests other unexplored locus of control effects on the divorce process. Studies reporting that internals tend to spend more time deliberating difficult or skill related decisions than externals (e.g. Rotter and Mulry 1965), suggests that internals spend more time deliberating the divorce decision than externals. Also, studies indicate that internals use vigilant problem solving methods, while externals use avoident problem solving methods (e.g. Parkes 1984). This research coupled with medical research showing that vigilant patients report more presurgery stress and less postsurgery stress, while avoident patients report the reverse (e.g. Janis 1958) implies the following in the divorce situation. Internals try to solve their marital-divorce difficulties sooner than externals, and as a result experience more predecision stress, earlier peak stress, less postdivorce stress, and better postdivorce social adjustment than externals.

The demographic variables and time since divorce were included in the hypothesized model, because they are known to impact on the divorce process. Although the literature is at times inconsistent, women (especially during the predecision stage), couples with children, and longer married couples tend to report the most divorce stress and adjustment difficulties. Additional research reports a decline in stress and improved adjustment with time from divorce decree (see Kitson and Raschke 1981 for review).

Method

Subjects: The subjects were 39 men and 68 women divorced in New Haven, Connecticut. They had a mean age of 32 (range 19 to 64) and a mean marriage duration of 10 years (range 1 to 35 years). The typical subject was white (93%), unremarried (81%), and experiencing a

first divorce (91%). Data from 3 of the 110 respondents was incomplete and , therefore, eliminated. Subjects were mailed a summary of the results and paid.

Procedure: Seventy couples (70 men and 70 women) were drawn at random from each of the desired time periods (six, twelve, and eighteen months postdivorce) from the Connecticut Health Department Divorce Records for New Haven Superior Court. Each person selected was mailed a letter requesting completion and return of an attached multiple choice questionnaire in exchange for a summary of the results and either $5.00 (150 subjects, first mailing) or $10.00 (270 subjects, second mailing).

The Divorce Questionnaire elicited the desired six measures of stress and adjustment, decision time, divorce difficulties, current marital status, and two measures of locus of control (scored in the standard external direction). The questionnaire and the measures included in the questionnaire were designed by the author with the assistance of 4 divorce therapists and 13 divorced individuals.

Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesized divorce model, a path analysis was executed. Standard regression coefficients, obtained from running ordinary multiple regressions on each dependent variable in the hypothesized model, were taken as path coefficients. Paths with standard beta weights less than .10 (absolute) were defined as practically insignificant and , therefore, trimmed from the model. The use of practical significance rather than statistical significance is suggested by Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1973). The reduced model is given in Figure 1. The causal effects for predecision outcomes and difficulties, divorce proper outcomes, and postdivorce outcomes are shown in Tables 1,2, and 3 respectively.

Figure 1 and Tables 1,2, and 3 about here

This final model and the corresponding tables, confirms most, but not all of the hypothesized model and supports the following conclusions. First, six of the seven predicted locus of control effects are confirmed. Compared to externals, internals experience more predecision stress, earlier peak stress, less stress during the divorce proper, shorter periods of stress during the divorce, less postdivorce stress and social maladjustment. Locus of control is not related to decision time.

Second, Rotter Locus of Control and Marriage Locus of Control predict different aspects of the divorce process. Rotter Locus of Control influences predecision stress, point of peak stress, postdivorce stress and social maladjustment. Marriage Locus of Control influences predecision stress, stress intensity, stress duration, and postdivorce stress and social maladjustment.

Third, the relationship between locus of control and heavy stress changes over time from an inverse relationship (predecision stress) to a direct relationship (postdivorce stress). This reversal may explain the previous inconsistencies in the findings of studies on locus of control and anxiety and stress. While most studies report that internality is related to lower distress and better poststress outcomes, some studies either report no locus of control differences or even greater stress and.or anxiety for internal than external subjects (for review see e.g. Thompson 1981).

Fourth, gender, children, marriage duration, and time since divorce decree predict divorce reactions. Women experience more predecision stress and longer predecision periods (as predicted), but surprisingly better postdivorce adjustment. As predicted, couples with children, especially children under 18, report longer decision time, more difficulties, later peak stress, greater divorce stress intensity, longer divorce stress, and more postdivorce stress. As predicted, longer married individuals reported longer decision periods and longer stress. Contrary to prediction, longer married couples report earlier peak stress, less predecision stress, and less postdivorce stress. These ameliorative effects occuring with longer marriages may reflect a slower divorce process, the positive impact of maturity on stress resolution, and/ or greater resources of older versus younger couples. Interestingly, stress, but not social maladjustment, decreases from 6 to 18 months postdivorce.

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Table 1
Causal Effects for Predecision Stress, Decision Time, and Difficulties

Dependent Variable	Explanatory Variable	Direct	Causal Indirect	Total
Predecision Stress	Gender (M=1; F=2)	.47***	.03	.50
(Multiple R=.55	Marriage Locus of Control	-.14	.00	-.14
R Square=.30)	Rotter Locus of Control	-.11	.00	-.11
	Marriage Duration	-.10	.00	-.10
Decision Time	Gender (M=1; F=2)	.21*	.00	.21
(Multiple R =.38	Marriage Duration	.20*	.06	.26
R Square=.15)	Children	.18	.00	.18
Difficulties	Children	.28**	.00	.28
(Multiple R =.28				
R Square= .08)				

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p <.001

Table 2
Causal Effects for Stress Peak, Intensity, and Duration

Dependent Variable	Explanatory Variable	Direct	Causal Indirect	Total
Point of Peak Stress	Marriage Duration	-.18	.01	-.17
(Multiple R= .28	Difficulties	.15	.00	.15
R Square =.08)	Predecision Stress	-.14	.00	-.14
	Rotter Locus of Control	.10	.02	.12
Divorce Stress Intensity	Predecision Stress	.27*	.00	.27
(Multiple R = .42	Difficulties	.19	.00	.19
R Square= .18)	Children	.14	.03	.1
	Marriage Locus of Control	.13	-.04	.09
	Decision Time	-.13	.00	-.13
Divorce Stress Duration	Difficulties	.43***	.00	.43
(Multiple R = .54	Marriage Locus of Control	.17	.00	.17
R Square = .30)	Children	.13	.12	.25
	Marriage Duration	.12	.04	.16

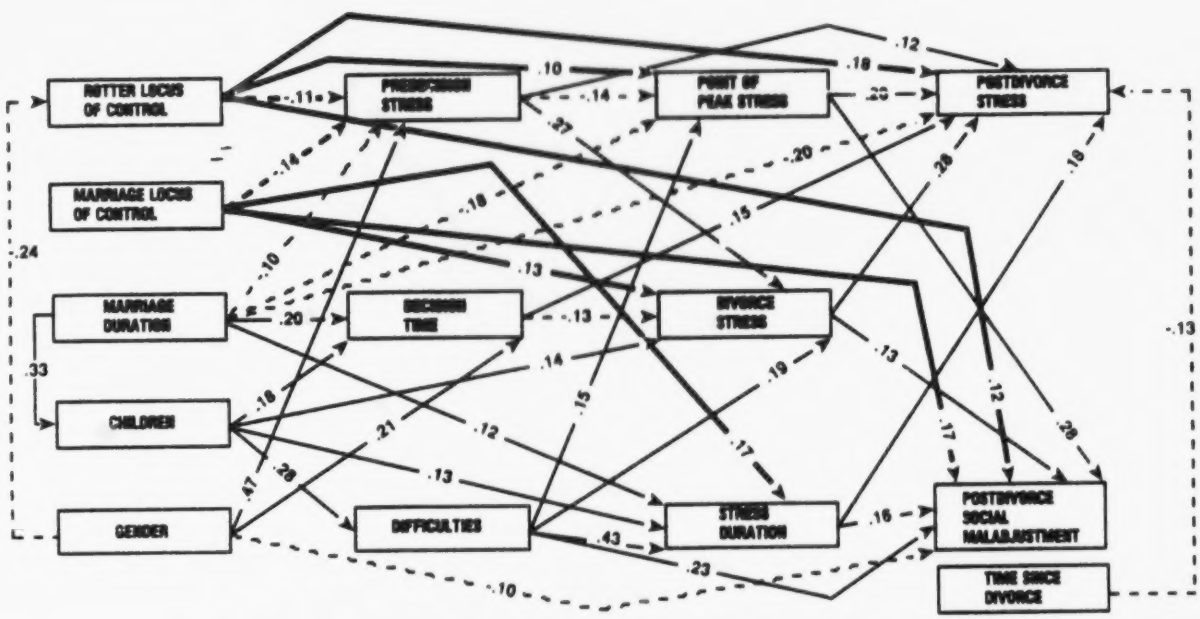
*p < .05 ***p < .001

Table 3
Direct, Indirect, and Total Causal Effects for Postdivorce Stress (Stress) and Postdivorce Social Maladjustment (Maladj.)

	Stress Causal			Maladj. Causal		
Explanatory Variable	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
Marriage Locus of Control	.07	.04	.11	.17	.04	.21
Rotter Locus of Control	.18*	-.01	.17	.12	.03	.15
Children	.03	.10	.13	-.05	.11	.06
Gender (M=1; F=2)	-.03	.10	.07	-.10	-.01	-.11
Marriage Duration	-.20*	.03	-.17	-.04	.02	-.02
Difficulties	.03	.16	.19	.23*	.08	.31
Decision Time	.15	-.04	.11	.08	-.02	.06
Predecision Stress	.12	-.03	.09	-.08	.00	-.08
Point of Peak Stress	.20*	.00	.20	.28**	.00	.28
Divorce Stress Intensity	.28**	.00	.28	.13	.00	.13
Divorce Stress Duration	.18	.00	.18	.16	.00	.16
Time Since Divorce	-.13	.00	-.13	-.07	.00	-.07
Multiple R		.60			.60	

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Figure 1. Reduced Path Diagram or Final Divorce Stress and Adjustment Model. ((___) Positive standard weights; (- - -) Negative standard weights; Gender is coded M=1; F=2.)



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Divorce Stress and Adjustment Model: Locus of Control and Demographic Predictors

Helen Smith Barnet, PhD

Abstract: One hundred and seven recently divorced men and women completed a mailed questionnaire eliciting locus of control, difficulties, decision time, and divorce stress and adjustment. Public records were used to obtain demographic data. The path analysis derived final model suggests: 1) Locus of control is related to predecision stress, peak stress point, stress intensity, stress duration, and postdivorce stress and adjustment, but unrelated to decision time. 2) The relationship between locus of control and heavy stress changes over time from an inverse to a direct relationship. 3) Compared to women, men report less predecision stress, shorter predecision periods, lower postdivorce adjustment, and more external Rotter Locus of Control scores. 4) Marriage length is directly related to decision time and stress duration, but inversely related to predecision stress, point of peak stress, and postdivorce stress. 5) Childless couples report fewer difficulties, less postdecision stress, and shorter predecision intervals.